XIO3

GCACE

Garden City Atari Computer Enthusiasts
1003 Amphion St. Victoria, B.C. Canada V8S 4G2

MARCH/APRIL 1997

March 27th Meeting!

The March meeting will be our annual Swap and Shop. Bring your wallets and extra hardware and software, and with luck you'll end up with new stuff at no cost! Well, I can dream, can't I?

Do you pine for Freeport? The Victoria Freenet will go exclusively to PINE for sending and receiving e-mail in the near future. Freeport will disapear, which is a shame because it was so simple. Like typical Unix and MSDOS users, the Freenet feels that the more difficult a piece of software is to use, the better it is so we now have to learn PINE. GCACE will have a meeting on March 29th at Arnold Napp's house from 2 till 4 pm to learn it. Arnold lives at 2239 Greenlands Rd.

Inside

ATARI® NEWS AND RUMOURS

by Rowland Grant

Atari is gone. Its assets are incorporated into JTS, a hard drive manufacturer. The assets were cash, Jaguar game systems inventory and a portfolio of copyrights and patents.

The cash has been spent on making hard drives. JTS is still losing money, but less than before. Sales of hard drives over the last twelve months were $119.5 million compared to $18.8 million for the previous period. On the merger with Atari, JTS took the opportunity to write down its accumulated research and development costs. It did the same with Atari's assets. And they say that "Atari's business ... will not be a significant part of the company's operations going forward". While the net loss of $25.8 million reported in the quarter ending February 1997 was mostly overhead, there was a net loss in production of $5.7 million due to write-offs of stock and replacement of obsolete equipment. It is rumoured that some of the write-offs may have resulted from damage to the plant in India during the monsoon season.

Anyway, JTS is now making 2.1GB 3.0 inch drives for lap-tops and similar capacity standard 3.5 inch drives. They have even higher capacity 3.0GB drives coming next. The margin of profit seems to be small. However, if JTS can continue to increase sales as it has in the past, at some point the production profits may cover the overhead costs of research, financing and sales. There has been concern over the quality of JTS's products. However, the sales growth may signify that JTS drives are no worse those of the competition. Someone has recently put up $25 million for a recent issue of JTS convertable preferred stock. Now there's confidence!

The Jaguar game systems are gone too. The Atari warehouse is almost empty. The stock is now in the hands of Tiger Direct, Video Game Liquidators and several others. Tiger Direct, of Miami Florida, is

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MEMBERSHIP

Membership dues are $25 per family per year. Membership includes a subscription to this newsletter, access to over 1000 8-bit public domain disks and 190 ST disks and increased time and upload/download ratio on the club BBS, Pothole. It can be reached by modem at (604) 642-6795.

MEETINGS

Meetings will be held in the Nellie McClung branch of the Library at 3950 Cedar Hill Road (corner of McKenzie) on the fourth Thursday of each month. All meetings are at 7 pm. There is no meeting in the month of December.

EDITORIAL

I'd like to welcome Ed Hall, from Whitehorse, to XIO3. Ed has had a column, The Garret, in *Atari Classics* and is a professional writer. I have known of him since around 1989, when I read a piece he had written for a magazine which mentioned a piece of software concerning writing for the 8-bit. I wrote to him and he kindly sent me the software. For many years GCACE has been in contact with him, with Ed sending us software and we sending him our newsletter. He even sends us $10 occasionallyfor mailing expenses.

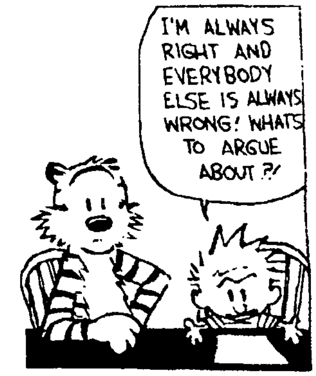
Since *Atari Classics* seems to be in limbo, if not actually dead, Ed sent us his column for inclusion in XIO3, which I am happy to accept. Hopefully he will continue to send us his work. I just hope *Atari Classics* will credit XIO3 if they should happen to publish this article!

Gord

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PEEKing Around



... Welcome to renewing members STEVE LEMMEN and TED MILNER. Ted, from Trail, B.C., is joining again after a short absence ... TED SKRECKY was regaling executive members at the last meeting about the new game he bought for his new computer, an IBM 486 (the CyberTraitor proved it's an I Burn Money by recently upgrading to a Pentium and soundblaster card). It seems the object of the game is to walk around with a gun, continually shooting at females, who yell and shriek all the time. JOHN TOWLER came up with best line of the night when he said Ted must have a non-PC PC ... After a week's work and extensive use of my vocabulary of naughty language, I finally got my new TT set up and with all the software working. Shortly after this major accomplishment, I got (with much help from CRAIG CARMICHAEL, John Towler and the filthy language again), the CD ROM working ... NOEL BLACK appeared at the April general meeting with a shaved head. I won't go for the cheap laugh ... If you now use Freeport for e-mail on the Victoria Freenet, you better show up at ARNOLD NAPP's house on March 29th between 2 and 4 pm. When the Freenet gets it's new software from Dalhousie University shortly, Freeport is not included, so you'll have to learn PINE, and it's not easy. Hopefully by March 29th, Ted Skrecky and I will know enough to get you started ... DANE STEGMAN, our corresponding member in Akron, New York, is now on the Internet. You can reach him at cf943@buffalo. edu. He is interested in both 8-bit and ST computers ... JOHN PICKEN left a message on the Pothole BBS message base European Echo to a fellow in Holland that was desperate for an Action! cartridge for his 8-bit that he would give him one at no charge if he simply paid $25 to become one of our corresponding members. Not too subtle a way to get members, but if it works, what the heck. We are already an international club with Dane Stegman as a member, maybe we'll be intercontinental? ... BOB NEX was goofing off from work by getting a viral infection requiring hospitalization. Hope you're feeling better now, Bob ... DOUG SKRECKY keeps sending me e-mail from Vancouver with results of his experiments with fruit flies. He's testing things like biotin and chromium to see if they have any effect on life span. I guess he figures if he can take some supplement to live long enough, he won't have to pay to have his head preserved cryogenically. He is also experimenting with me by providing me with biotin capsules, with the intent of lowering my need for insulin. This has been approved by my doctor, and preliminary results appear to bear this out ... Remember to phone GORD at 475-0857 with all the dirty little deeds you observe fellow GCACE members engaged in ...

New Goodies For Old Diehards

by John Picken

Over the past month I've completed a couple of software projects for the 8-bit Atari, the principal one being RAMJET, a package of two super-fast RAMdisk handlers and utilities to renumber and modify the operation of either. These are for use with SpartaDOS (disk) and probably will work with BW-DOS. Both offer the following:

- Low memory usage is a minimum of 103 bytes and a up to 315 bytes less than any compatible RD from other sources.
- Speed is 175-300 percent of the speed of compatible RD's. For comparison, RAMJET in it's fastest configuration, is four and a half times faster than the SpartaDOS-X RAMdisk.
- Redirection of other drives allows you to run everything out of the RD as D1: (and therefore the dreaded "D:" default that lazy programmers are fond of using). With redirection, you don't have to switch your real drives to bump them up one.
- One handler offers an auxillary RD as well as a complete emulation of a real drive.
- Either handler can be renumbered to D0: making it transparent to the system. This means you can have up to nine drives or hard drive partitions on your system and still use a RD.
- The renumber utility comes in a normal DOS version as well as two for the EXpress Pro BBS.
- Either RD can be set up in single or double density. Single density packs more files into your available memory but double density results in a 10-20% speed gain.

The second project was a revamp of the modifications I did to MYDOS 4.51 about two years ago to work with XL2. This came about as the result of a message from a user in The Netherlands who wanted the modifications applied to MYDOS 4.53. He wanted them so badly he called The Pothole to upload the DOS source code for me. (There's a confirmed MYDOS fanatic!)

The result was XEDOS453 and XLDOS453. They are similar to my 4.51 modifications but offer a new feature: the ability to select the number of file size digits displayed in a directory list-

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marketing Jaguar systems, games and accessories through mail order using magazines and the internet. Jaguar CD units are selling for $69, about one third of the original price. Tiger is also selling CD game packages averaging $10 a disk. Much of the stock that it is shipping still has the old Walmart price tags, showing that the original retail price was three to six times higher. There are reports that Jaguar CD units sell for as little as $40 at some retail outlets. Tiger Direct will send a Jaguar console package to Canada for $67.00 (US) shipping included. Video Game Liquidators has a similar deal.

Atari is no longer publishing games but it has some on hand for others to publish. Telegames has licensed Iron Soldier II and World Tour Racing, to be published on CD format. Zero-5 and Worms are due in cartridge format. There are even a couple of new Atari Lynx games due: Raiden and Fat Bobby. Recently Telegames received the encryption code for Iron Soldier II, and release of the game was planned for February. While CD ROM disks are easy to make compared to cartridges, there are rumours that problems arising from Atari's encryption code and unexpected difficulties in producing the glass CD printing die will delay the release of Iron Soldier II.

There is more about the Zero-5 game. Apparently Atari commissioned Caspian Software to do the game in January 1995. I presume that Caspian got some money up front, with the balance due on completion. They delivered the beta version of Zero-5 to Atari in February 1996. But Atari kept finding fault with the game and delayed payment. Caspian ran out of funds and went out of business. Atari never paid. And now Atari (JTS) has released Zero-5 to Telegames for publication. A sad reminder of Atari's sharp practices under the control of the "business is war" Tramiels. In that war, the enemy seemed to be the suppliers and customers.

Of course all small game producers are at risk. A few years ago a small Canadian company called H2O Entertainment produced a neat Tetris type game called Sphear for the Atari Jaguar. The demo of Sphear got rave reviews. Nintendo wooed H2O away to produce the game for it's new Nintendo 64 system under the name Tetrisphere. But after two years it seems that Tetrisphere didn't get approval from Nintendo. The game seems to have been dropped. However, I presume Nintendo treated them fairly, since H2O Entertainment is still in business. They recently posted the humorous notice: "20 Uses for Jaguar Development Kits". The first on the list was "prototyping games for the Nintendo 64".

The long, long awaited BattleSphere game is still not out. But the game must be near completion since there are reports that the code is running out of ROM space in the cartridge. Some time ago it was rumoured that Toad Computers would back the release of this game. Now the rumours are that Telegames will publish BattleSphere. There are reports that Telegame's first release, Towers II, has been selling well. Toad Computers sold out of Towers II and had to re-order. This is encouraging for Telegames. There are rumours that other titles from Atari's hoard such as Toon Adventures and Slam Racer may be published.

It has been known for some time that Wizztronics was interested in purchasing TOS from Atari. Now there are reports that Steve Cohen of Wizztronics has called various distributors with the news that he has managed to buy TOS. Previously he needed a modified TOS to run his Barracuda enhancement boards for the Falcon, but for some reason Atari didn't license TOS to Wizztronics. Nobody has reported seeing a functioning Barracuda board in North America, however there are persistent claims that a few turned up in Europe. Now Steve is talking about making a Falcon compatible computer that would sell for $1500 (US). There is a lot of scepticism about all this.

> ***... a Falcon compatible computer that would sell for $1500 US***

There is a lot of competition too. After all, C-Lab Falcons are readily available, and C-Lab has the right to use and modify TOS 4. Then there are the Medusa and Hades TT clones which use a modified TOS 3 (also licensed). Computer Direct makes a version of the Hades computer under the label DirectT40/60. The same company will assemble a customized and accelerated Falcon for you. Do we need any more TOS computers? Probably not, but they may be coming.

Centek in France is still working on the Phenix computer. This seems to be a kind of super Falcon. It is supposed to be able to handle GEM software. But its Dolmen operating system may not be entirely compatible with GEM. A working prototype of the Phenix has been promised for the end of March. Production models are supposed to be available in July. At present nothing seems to have been completed. The capability of those doing the engineer-

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ing and the software has been questioned. Centek does produce accelerator boards for Falcon computers. However critics have dismissed them as reverse engineered copies of German products. A new accelerator board, the Centurbo II is planned which will allow a Falcon to have many of the capabilities of the proposed Phenix. This new board will include a socket for an EPROM containing the Dolmen kernel. Centurbo II could be used by software developers programming for Dolmen.

TOS computers mostly use SCSI devices. The old ST line needs a SCSI interface. This need has been well served in the past by ICD and others. As computers became more complex the SCSI devices became more sophisticated, first requiring parity matching, and now initiator identification. The original ICD host adaptor boards were replaced with the compact Link connector. When parity became a problem, ICD released the Link II. Now ICD seems to have left the Atari market. Fortunately a new host adapter, called Link96, has been developed in Germany and should be available soon. Link96 can handle initiator identification which seems to be needed by many current hard drives. Link96 is listed in the latest Computer Direct catalogue, but no price is given. There are rumours that the developer of Link96 is working on an ethernet card for networking ST's and SCSI devices.

Another item from Germany is the Magnum ST card for extending the RAM to the full 16MB that the Motorola 68000 can access. Normally the memory management unit limits the RAM to 4MB. The card requires TOS 2.06 and a socketed CPU. A similar product was released by another firm in Britain a few years ago. There is also an aixTT card that extends TT fast RAM to 64MB.

Internet and the World Wide Web have become popular in recent years. Normally the internet and web are accessed through an internet connection provider. The web requires special software to access it. There are various protocols which the service provider may use. Up to now, web access through TOS computers has involved using various freeware or shareware programs. One of the best and most popular of these has been Crystal Atari Browser CAB, combined with the ST Internet Kit STiK. Now it would appear that the latest issue of CAB (version 2.0) will be commercial software marketed by Application Systems Heidleberg (ASH). The STiK package only interfaces with web providers using the SLIP protocol. This is becoming less common as more providers are using PPP and other modes.

The lack has been recognized, and commercial software similar to STiK is becoming available. One of these is Termite. This software was developed for Amiga computers, and has been ported over to TOS platforms. Termite will be marketed by HiSoft in Britain and Oregon Research in the U.S. The Termite package handles PPP and ships with a collection of internet/web utilities. Bob Luneski of Oregon Research has mentioned that they are working with the CAB developers so that CAB will support Termite when it is released in April. This may be the reason for CAB going commercial. Apparently Application Systems Heidleberg has a HTML (web page) editor called Texel. Texel 1.6 works with CAB. So the combination of Termite, CAB and Texel could be the answer for web access. There are rumours that ASH is not relying on Termite, and has begun work on its own internet connect software.

Another commercial web package is Webmaster, due soon from Oxo Concept. I have no details other than the price of $60. There is freeware that will provide for PPP protocols. Combinations of programs such as GlueSTiK and PPPkit14 with CAB have worked for some, and not for others. Web access is also available through KEMD, a Mint distribution kit from Knarf. With it you can get a PPP driver, full Unix environment and a multitasking operating system. You can even use it to set up your own network. It's all free and useable if you can handle the Unix environment.

Upgrades of commercial software are still appearing. Protext word processor is now at version 6.7 and seems to work well on any TOS computer at most screen resolutions. It costs about 50 pounds (UK). TaxWizard II+ is shipping for those who must file a US federal tax return. Such software is updated each year of course. The market must be large enough to be worth the effort. Richard Carsmaker reports that he has personally sold 3000 copies of his Ultimate Virus Killer to date. He isn't sure how many copies the dealers have sold. The new version 7 can recognize and eliminate over 1800 different viruses.

John S. Gray published a fascinating interview with Howard Carson in XEST, the newsletter of NSCAUG (Nova Scotia). Here is an summary of the part concerning Calamus. MGI corporation was started by Nathan Potechin of DMC and Oren Asher of DITEK. MGI owns the rights worldwide to Calamus desk top publishing software. Dietmar Meyfeldt's DMC Germany has the rights to develop the German edition. DMC Germany has completed the next version of Calamus for TOS computers. This has a number of new features and

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KOMPUTRZ & KRE8IVITY

by Ed Hall

Ray Bradbury was recently asked by *People* magazine if he owned a computer. His response: "No. I write on an IBM Wheelwriter. I could out-type you any day. I write a short story in three hours, and I don't change it. Computers are for changes."

Personally, I'm not sure I'd want to brag about never revising a story--for one thing it makes writing seem a bit too oracular. A more balanced view comes from David Cronenberg and Salman Rushdie. In the July/August 95 issue of Shift, a magazine on "media culture," the following exchange appeared.

Cronenberg: Now J. G. Ballard being the prophet of technology that he is, said he can tell when a novel has been written on a computer.

Rushdie: I think that's crap.

Cronenberg: I do too. He said, "They just go on and on." And I said, "You know, people have written by hand and gone on and on."

Rushdie: In my view, my writing has got tighter and more concise because I no longer have to perform the mechanical act of re-typing endlessly. And all the time that was taken up by that mechanical act is freed to think. So I have more thinking and less machine time.

Cronenberg: I remember almost not changing a sentence that was bad because it would mean cutting and pasting.

Rushie: Of course. And I had this kind of fetish about presenting clean copy. I don't like presenting my publisher with pages with lots of crossings-out and scribbling. So I would be manic at the end of typing a page where actually I didn't want to change anything, not at all... So there's no doubt in my mind that the computer's improved my writing. And for exactly the opposite reason of what Ballard says.

Plots Unlimited

"Confused by all the computer programs for writers?" asks an ad in Writer's Digest. Quite frankly, yes, though not for the same reason the ad suspects. Way back in my very first column (in *Atari Classics* Ed.), I mentioned Plots Unlimited, a piece of software for generating stories on PCs and Macs. I thought it was a pretty goofy idea. Well, an intriguing goofy idea. I mean, if a computer program can defeat the reigning world chess champion at least once, why can't it write a good story? Or, what is perhaps more reasonable, write something highly formulaic, like a sitcom?

Apparently there's lots of authorware in the Mac/PC world, everything from programs like ScriptWare, which sets up the specialized formats required for film and TV scripts, to programs that do the actual writing for you. SportsWriter, for example, is a program in use today by many small-circulation newspapers. Punch in data from a high-school basketball game and the program spits out "fairly generic" copy. There's even a word processor that completes words before you finish keying them in.

Where will it all end? I am reminded of that old, Nebula-award winning story by Robert Silverberg, "*Good News from the Vatican,*" in which a computer becomes pope.

As you can tell, the whole business fascinates me, and when I saw the latest incarnation of Plots Unlimited, I just had to get it! Why? Because (hold on to your joysticks!) P.U. is now available to all Atari users, both 8- and 16-bitters. Yep, it's true. In fact, Plots Unlimited is available in a universal format which any computer owner can use. It's a book.

So I ordered the dang thing. Remember "paint-by-numbers"? Well, P.U. is write-by-numbers, a database of plot elements which you use in much the same way as those "choose-your-own adventure" books. The plot elements are stated in very general terms--"Jack's wife, Carol, desperately needs money for a certain purpose." You can quite quickly cobble together a plot, but you will have to supply the details and the dialogue to give the story its spark.

A writing aid like P.U. is actually quite logical when you stop to think about it. With the dominance of TV as an art form (well, I use the term loosely), and with the resulting decrease in the attention span of viewers, plot is assuming a greater relevance in fiction. Stories zip along at breakneck velocity--so fast, in fact, I am certain many of today's films would be incomprehensible to people not reared on them. Their speed (measured in "jolts per minute") is a function of plot, never character or setting. In fact, for many hit TV shows a single plotline is not enough; usually there are two of them going at the same time.

Writers of "serious" literature may scoff at P.U. as a producer of fodder for

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plot-hungry markets like sitcoms and thrillers, but so too did chess-players once scoff at the idea of a computer beating an international grand master. Deep Blue, the IBM supercomputer which managed to steal a game from Kasparov, considers more than 100 million moves per second. What if IBM were to build Deep Plot, a computer devoted exclusively to story construction?

Microserfs

From a computer program that can help write a novel, we go to a novel about computer programmers who need help. However, Microserfs by Douglas Coupland (originator of the term "generation x") is not the type of novel that could have been generated by P.U. because it's nearly plotless. The story, such as it is, revolves around a group of programmers working for Microsoft in Seattle. They quit and move to Silicon Valley to start up their own software company. That's the plot.

What makes the book so much fun is the sheer brilliance of the writing. The novel is mostly a long series of discussions and animadversions on life in the'90s, a search for meaning and identity by twenty-somethings whose main connection with reality ("Daniel, do I seem alive?") is consumer products ("...we looked for an Italian restaurant so we could re-enact the classic Lady and the Tramp spaghetti-noodle/kiss scene."). Microserfs is a novelized Trivial Pursuit, an intellectual McDonald's, a combination of Wayne's World and Plato's dialogues for '90s consumers.

Daniel and his friends are lost souls, computer geeks out of sync with life, themselves, everything. Even when they focus on their bodies, they cannot avoid overdoing it: "Apparently after you body-build, you have a two-hour time window in which your body can suck up amino acids. This is your protein window. I was talking to him and he said, 'Man, I'd like to talk some more, but my protein window is closing,' and he ran off to the kitchen and ate a chicken."

Daniel faints a lot, Susan has problems with her "dating architecture," Karla is a recovering anorexic, Bug discovers he's a homosexual, Michael falls in love with someone named BarCode on the Internet, and so on. Yet because they're all brainy programmers, Coupland sees them as contemporary high priests who examine not entrails but consumer products: breakfast cereals, Gap clothing, tampons, Star Trek, Barbies, etc. Everything has a subtext. Their penchant for introspection is evident even in the name they choose for their company: Interiority. Daniel starts keeping "subconscious files" on his computer, which are reproduced throughout the novel like illustrations, whole pages taken up by lists of words in fonts of varying size. Other pages are filled with a single word, 0s and 1s, consonants, vowels, or encrypted words: "She sed th@t we, az humanz, bear the brdn uv havng 2 B evry animl in the wrld rold in2 1. She sed th@t we rEly hav no identiT uv our own. She sed, 'Wh@ iz human B-havior, X-ept tryng 2 proov th@t w'r not animalz?' She sed, 'I think we hav strAd so far awA from our animal originz th@ we R bent on kre8ng a noo, soopra-animal idNtiT.' She sed, 'Wh@t R komputrz but the EvryAnimalMashEn?' I kouldn't BlEv she wuz talkng like this. She wuz like an episode of Star Trek made flesh."

There are the usual high-jinks associated with computer companies. At Microsoft "we lapsed into one of our weekly-ish communal stress-relieving frenzies--we swiped sheets of bubble-pak from the supply rooms and rolled over them with our office chairs, popping hundreds of plastic zits at a go. We punished plastic troll dolls with 5-irons, blasting them down the hallway, putting yet more divots in the particle board walls and the ceiling panels. We drank Tabs and idly slagged interactic CD technology (Todd: "I used the Philips CDI system--it's like trying to read a coffee table book with all of the pages glued together.").

The book is a hoot for 300 pages, then suddenly becomes a bit tiresome, a bit self-indulgent, as Coupland maneuvers us toward the ending. Though he has cleverly prepared us for the finale by means of the "subconscious files," it takes too long in coming, and the conceit, while interesting, isn't strong enough to carry the weight of a satisfying conclusion.

Of course, endings are notoriously difficult to write. (Hm, is this a product niche which needs filling?) In the meantime, read and enjoy the book, and if at any time you lose patience with it, skip ahead to page 360 to see how it turns out. Then put it in a time capsule; it'll have great nostalgia value. As Daniel says, "The great Atari gaming collapse of 1982 (*sigh* I remember it well)."

VARIABLE Opera

Finally, I offer you my own bent example of how computers can inspire creativity--a short story written in the form of a BASIC program. (Er, please don't type it in.)

------------ CHARACTER SET -------------

100 Bad Irving - he refuses to clean up after his horse.

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120 Sheriff Bob - he's replacing hitching posts with parking meters.

130 Wilbur - he drinks from the horse trough.

140 The Parson - the parson.

150 Miss Daisy - a right purdy gal.

160 Diamond Lil - it's rumored her children are legitimate.

170 The Schoolmarm - she's got a lot to learn.

180 Johnny Muskrat - some call him Chief.

190 Squeegee - they found him in the desert.

200 Professor Periscope - he's build ing a strange contraption.

210 Also appearing - the cardsharp, the greenhorn, the town drunk, the old prospector, the mysteri- ous drifter, the Sheriff's horse.

-------- DIALOGUE --------

220 Ghost Gulch ain't big enuff fer the two of us.

230 Looks like they figgered out my true identity.

240 I love you.

250 I hate you.

260 Which orifice shall I use?

270 Set your lasers to fry.

280 We'll head 'em off at the past.

-------- SOUND EFFECTS --------

290 Blam!

300 Thud!

310 Zzzzzt!

320 Vrooom!

330 Squeakedy squeakedy squeakedy...

-------- PLOT DATA --------

340 Sheriff Bob asks Bad Irving to be his partner.

350 Wilbur stumbles across the Pro fessor's contraption.

360 The parson receives a mysteri ous phone call. 370

Miss Daisy straps on her shootin' irons. 380

Diamond Lil gives the greenhorn a lesson in bareback riding. 390

Johnny Muskrat comes down with smallpox. 400

Squeegee falls in love with the Sheriff's horse. 410

Professor Periscope's evil twin shows up. 420

The cardsharp and the drifter visit the souvenir shop. 430

Wilbur gets an erection. 440

The schoolmarm uses her magical powers. 450

The old prospector is possessed by a being from another dimension. 460

The town drunk wakes up in the Sheriff's dungeon. 470

Bad Irving blows up the galaxy.

-------- SETTING --------

480 Ghost Gulch is a town, dude ranch, theme park, BBS, planet, game, metaphor.

-------- ERROR MESSAGES --------

490 Out of ammo.

500 Nonexistent device.

510 Stack overflow.

520 Wrong dimension.

530 Character flaw.

540 Plot malfunction.

-------- TEMPORAL ARRAY --------

550 19th century

560 20th century

570 21st century.

-------- VARIABLES --------

580 Horse, Soap, Space

590 Shootin' iron, Uzi, blaster.

600 Hitching post, parking meter, park ing orbit.

610 Bootleg still, cold fusion gimmick, time machine.

620 Sysop, dungeonmaster, narrator.

630 God, prime mover, programmer.

640 Conflict, climax, resolution.

-------- CONSTANTS --------

650 Death and taxes.

660 The speed of light.

670 Software-driven spacetime.

-------- MAIN LOOP --------

680 Someone falls in love.

690 Someone gets shot.

700 Someone goes away.

710 A beautiful sunset.



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is a significant improvement. It will be translated into English over the next few months. Perhaps available this summer, it will be the last upgrade of Calamus for TOS computers. The new version will interface with third party modules from Adequate Systems. These include a full postscript module, a paint program and a new editor called eddie. There is a MERGE module that can create transparencies out of two different frames. Computer Direct sells the Adequate Systems modules. DMC is concentrating on the marketing of Calamus for Windows NT and Windows 95 computers. DMC sees little profit in translating Calamus to the Mac platform, and will not release a Macintosh version.

Gemulator Classic, the Atari ST emulator for Intel based computers using DOS, Windows 3,1 or OS/2, has been updated (now version 3.6). It is free for downloading. However, it does seem to require the Gemulator ROM board. Darek Mihocka posted the update for current users of Gemulator, but anyone may use it. The demo version of the faster and more powerful Gemulator 95 is available also. Another ST emulator called PacifiST is freeware. It is reported to be more compatible with game software than Gemulator, but not quite so easy to use. PacifiST is still under development and does not handle sound at present.

For colour publishing, flatbed scanners are essential. Microtek makes a scanner that can handle photo quality 24-bit colour images. It makes another that handles 30-bit images. Homa Systems House in Ottawa has developed software drivers for these Microtek scanners. It markets this software for TOS computers under the name ScanX for about $50 (US). Another version, PROScanX will be released soon with many image handling capabilities. Price is about $125 (US). Drivers and utilities for other flatbed scanner models are planned.

What about a new U.S. based Atari magazine? That question came up recently, and was quickly answered.

ATARI COMPUTING

There are about 15 subscribers to *Atari Computing* in the U.S. and around 30 in Canada. The subscriptions are slowly increasing, but the total is small. There are only a few advertisers left. When Toad withdrew from advertising Atari products, Rod MacDonald couldn't afford to keep publishing *ST Informer*. There are rumours that someone has talked to Rod about buying the magazine. Maybe that's the person who put out the question. *Atari Computing* is mostly a volunteer effort, so is *Current Notes*. A fully commercial magazine devoted to Atari computers is no longer feasible in North America. You can "keep on keepin' on", and you can go broke too.

Compo, a source of TOS software and hardware in Britain, went bankrupt. However the German branch is still thriving and advertising. I was interested to learn that Compo has an agent in the U.S.A. Apparently they can get any of the products carried by Compo in Germany.

Atari ST computers may be out of date but they are still being used in surprising places. In many European cities there are visiting card machines in stations and commercial areas. It is customary in some countries to leave a card. Many of these machines are constructed using a 1040STFM with software on cartridge, an inkjet printer and card cutting mechanism. The machines use an Atari Mono monitor and a customized keyboard. This particular brand of card machine has been seen all over Spain and even in Hong Kong. A visitor to a Swiss ski resort in the Bernese Oberland reports that the re sort office uses sev eral Mega STe's, net worked together. In North America, ST's have been seen in the back office of a computer lab that is otherwise filled with Sun Workstations. They've even been found in the office of a computer store that only sells PC's. Yes, when you get used to GEM you're spoiled for life.

In a recent *Computer Shopper* magazine, John Dvorak devoted his "What Ever Happened To?" column to the history of Atari. John noted that there are several parties interested in buying the Atari name and logo from JTS. One of these is rumoured to be none other than Nolan Bushnell, the original founder of Atari. Could things will go full circle? Could we have another quarter century of fun with Atari? Not likely. Someone asked Nolan Bushnell about the rumour. He said "I stopped the process over six months ago. Too complex." Well, that's it.

Lots'a Software!

by Ted Skrecky

The unthinkable has happened.... back in December I acquired my first I Burn Money (IBM) machine. It was a 486 DX266. Even though that was just a few months ago, I have already blown more money on a new motherboard so I now have a Cyrix 120mhz Pentium system. This Cyrix machine supposedly runs at the same speed as an Intel 150mhz Pentium system. The good news is, unlike most other Atari ST owners who purchase Bill Gates approved hardware, I have not gone totally insane. I have not sold any of my Atari ST/8bit hardware or software and I have not been babbling about Windows 3.1 being the greatest Graphical User Interface (GUI) on Planet Earth. Just for fun, I once did try to say something positive to somebody about Windows 3.1 but I started laughing uncontrollably, fell to the ground and started rolling around the floor, kicking my legs and flapping my arms. The person I was talking to picked-up a nearby telephone. Twenty minutes later a vehicle pulled-up outside and several people wearing military uniforms got out. After shooting me with a dozen or so tranquilizer darts, I was finally back to normal.

My main reason for purchasing a PC machine was to do one thing.... play games that require you to run-down texture-mapped corridors, blasting everything in sight. Although there are tons of great ST games, the ST isn't quite capable of doing those real fancy games such as Duke Nukem 3D or Tomb Raider. Besides being able to play the new PC games, my Pentium system is helping to continue my Atari addiction. Thanks to the 4X speed CD ROM unit, I can now access CDs that are filled with Atari ST public domain and shareware programs.

I had heard that Suzy B Software had a two CD set of some of the best Atari ST software. On one fine Saturday I tried to phone Computer Direct which is in Edmonton. Unfortunately, I discovered that store is closed on Saturdays. I next contacted Systems For Tomorrow which is located in Independence, Missouri. The SFT person informed me that the Suzy B CDs were no longer available. According to him, Toad Computers were responsible for the reproduction of the CDs and, from what I understand, Toad Computers has been busy recently nuking its Atari support. Not long ago I read a message on comp.sys.atari.st that they no longer even have an Atari ST tech person in the store. The possibility that Toad will do another production run of Suzy B CDs is next to zero.

Although I am sure there still are some places that have the Suzy B CDs for sale, I didn't feel like phoning anymore stores so I asked the SFT person if he had the Crawly Crypt collection. Crawly Crypt is a BBS and they have made two CDs which contain a lot of the files from their BBS along with many programs that have been acquired from places such as FTP sites on the Internet. The good news is that Systems For Tomorrow did have both CDs and both were on sale so I ordered them. I was told there is a third CD being produced soon and there is some work already being done on the fourth Crawly Crypt CD.

I have received both CDs and have examined them. Most programs on the CDs are uncompressed. The exceptions are some demos and also most of the disk magazines, such as Maggie, which are compressed with the Magic Shadow Archiver. There is an index file on each CD and they have english language descriptions for all the programs. Besides having lots of ST utilities, apps, games and such, there is a surprisingly good selection of Falcon specific programs. There is also a folder on each CD which contains programs that will run only on an Atari TT system.

The GCACE executive has talked about how to make the software on these two CDs easily available to club members. Gordon Hooper, our illustrious, vodka-snorting leader, has offered to bring a CD-ROM drive to each club meeting. With a special adapter, the CD-ROM drive can be connected to an Atari ST computer. With respect to the two index files, I had to do a little bit of editing in order to fit the catalogues onto one disk. Anybody who is interested in the software on these CDs should bring along a blank disk to a club meeting and I will make a copy of the Crawly Crypt index disk. One thing I want to mention is that when you are requesting files from these CDs, make sure you tell me which CD the files are on and what are the names of the subdirectory(s) the programs are in. With respect to the Falcon files, some programs are

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rather huge. If you require a Falcon program which will not fit on a 900K extended-format disk, I can use the high-density 1.44 meg drive on my Pentium system to make a copy.

In the last GCACE ST catalogue update I did, I added a hard drive optimizer program called Optimizer Version 2.3. At first this looked to me to be an utterly excellent hard disk defragger. As time went by, I discovered my hard drive had developed numerous problems. Some partitions had lost clusters and duplicate filenames were appearing in some file directories. I have now fixed all of these problems and, at the same time, I have deleted this defragger program from our catalogue. It is definitely not a good idea to use this program.

I would like to end this issue of my library report by mentioning some of the rather interesting things I have discovered in my travels through IBM land. First of all there is Windows Version 3.1. One of Duke Nukem's favourite comments is "This sucks". Well, that basically sums-up my opinion of Windows. It is definitely not user friendly. My ST with TeraDesk, Universal Item Selector III, Silkmouse and Quick ST II runs circles around Windows 3.1. I actually find Windows 3.1 such a total pain to use that I spend most of my time using the MSDOS command-line. I thought a GUI was suppose to make using a computer much easier but Bill Gates has proven this theory to be wrong. There is one last thing I will say about Windows. If you do something that Windows doesn't like, it gives you a message which says you must reboot windows and failing to do so will likely cause lots of data corruption on your hard drive. Oh joy!

The main reason I own a Pentium system is to play games. However, as it turns out, I seem to spend very little of my time playing games on this system. "What do I do with this system", you ask. Well, I basically spend most of my time reconfiguring my sound card, modifying autoexec.bat and config.sys, running memmaker and doing all sorts of other dumb stuff. I have encountered all sorts of problems when trying to play games. One problem is lack of memory. Hey, I got 16 megs of RAM and games are complaining about lack of memory!!! What gives here? The thing about PC land is, even though you may have 16 megs of RAM, you only have 640K of what is called conventional memory. If drivers such as for your sound card suck-up too much of your conventional memory, games will fail to run. To fix this problem, you must run memmaker which will bump programs such as the sound card driver into higher memory.

Another problem I have encountered is with games that require a specific type of memory. Yes, besides conventional memory, there are a few other types. Some games require expanded memory. To set aside a few megs of RAM for expanded memory, you have to add a line to your autoexec.bat file. When editing autoexec.bat, if you make a mistake, you can completely screw-up your entire system. You may find that you can no longer access the hard drive. For this reason, I always make a bootable disk which contains my old autoexec.bat and config.sys. If I make a mistake, I boot the PC with this disk and then I can copy these files back onto my hard drive.

There are many more horror stories I can talk about but since this article is suppose to be about Atari computers, I will just say one more thing about my Pentium..... Trying to fix sound-related problems has been consuming a significant amount of my time recently. Quite frequently, I have encountered games which suffer from sound glitches. I have played with the options on my sound card and sometimes I have managed to fix the problem. Sometimes adjusting the sound options in the game can fix a problem. Many times, though, I can't solve sound glitch related problems. Also, if you are using headphones, I hope you enjoy the constant back-ground hiss. I basically wasn't impressed with the sound from my $45 Zoltrix sound card so I went to Tesseract Software and spend $150 on a Sound Blaster 16 (SB16) card by Creative Labs. I spent several hours modifying the options for this card and I have come to the conclusion that, like Windows, the SB16 sucks. I talked to Gary Nicholls of the Canadian Computer Recyclers and he has heard that the SB16 is a rather poor product. My cheap Zoltrix card, which I am not terribly enthusiastic about, is vastly superior to the expensive garbage that Creative Labs have dumped on the public. From my experience to date, I would have to say that Commodore's Amiga 500 computer is easily the best system if you want excellent sound. However, if you want a computer that is extremely easy to use and has lots of excellent games, utilities and productivity software, the only computer system you should own is an Atari ST.

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ing. This can be really handy with programs that expect to get three (or four) digits and choke when reality doesn't meet their expectation. Because of the modification, it is not necessary to keep the three digit (4.53/3) and four digit (4.53/4) versions of MYDOS around and reboot from one to the other.

The other features are the same as in my 4.51 modification and include compatibility with SpartaDOS RD's, simpler RAMdisk setup, cartridge and BASIC control and, a mini-RD for the 800XL or 65XE.

Copies of these programs are available from me directly, by mail c/o GCACE, or from The Pothole BBS (250-642-6795, 300-14k4, 24 hours). The Sparta RD handlers are in the BBS file SIG #9 (8-bit SpartaDOS) as RAMJET.ARC and the MYDOS modifications are in file SIG #26 (8-bit OS/DOS) under the name XEDOS453.ARC.

If you use a large RAM 8-bit, these programs, especially when combined with XL2, will give you one of the fastest and most convenient Atari-8's ever imagined.

Keep the 8-bit faith.



8 BIT AFFAIRS

Antic Online!

by Rowland Grant

Philip Price is the author and owner of the popular Alternate Reality games, City and Dungeon. He was impressed by the continuing interest in the games by the Atari 8-bit community. So impressed, that he released the games for downloading. Now Philip has gone one step further and is heading a project to create Alternate Reality Online. This is a multiplayer role playing game with a plot similar to the original. It will be released in mid-1998 by Monolith Productions. Gary Gilbertson wrote the music for the original Alternate Reality games. He is also involved in the online project. I suspect that something more than an 8-bit Atari will be needed to take part in the online version.

The Digital Antic Project is progressing slowly. This involves digitizing the text and some images from Antic magazine and making it available in HTML form on the world wide web. Jim Capparell, the publisher of Antic has given permission for the project. So far most of the work has been done by Mark Simonson and Kevin Savetz. They have digitized all the cover art, some of the more memorable ads, and the text of six issues. They are looking for more volunteers to do OCR scanning, proofing and HTML conversions.

Benjamin Smith is becoming a major source of Atari software and hardware, new and used. Recently he announced that he has bought up the last remaining stock of the games Gorf and Space Journey for the Atari 400/800. He has also cornered the

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Mailbag

February 20, 1997

Dear Gordon,

I received the ST Format magazine along with the disk yesterday. Would you please thank Mr. Ted Skrecky for me. You guys are the greatest, when it comes to getting something for a fellow Atarian. Now all I want is a Falcon, and if you know someone who has one, they can send it to me, at no charge too.<G>

I was able to be on your Victoria Freenet this past Monday. I guess in order to leave a message or to read messages and get to the other web sites, I have to sign up. I'll send you my e-mail address on my local Freenet. Maybe we can pass along messages on there together. My address is cf943@freenet buffalo.edu. Thank you!

Yours truly,

Dane Stegman

PS: Thanks again for the ST Format/Disk

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market on new issues of Print Shop. I notice that Ben has also managed to get a (functioning?) prototype of the Atari 1090XL expansion unit. This plugs into the parallel bus of the Atari 800XL. The Atari 1090XL was never put into production. Curt Vendel has developed an IDE interface card for his 1090XL. Apparently most 1090XL prototypes did not have a top cover. Curt is having a dozen covers made. He is selling the IDE interface for $60 and the cover for $15. There should be enough room in the expansion unit for a 3 inch IDE hard drive mechanism.

Nothing has been heard from Mike Hohman of Fine Tooned Engineering (FTe) for months. There have been many complaints that Mike cashed cheques, billed credit cards and then disappeared without filling the orders. He still seems to be in or near Phoenix Arizona. Curt Vendel reports that he recently went to Santa Cruz, California to look through a storage space full of Atari things. Rent had not been paid for quite awhile. I presume that the stuff was to be sold to recover the rent owed. Curt found 144 boxes of ICD cartons, books etc. He also found that this material was owned by a Mike Holman. Another investigator has confirmed that Mike Hohman is really Mike Holman. No wonder he has been hard to find. It's all very unfortunate as FTe has the rights to some of the best development software for the 8-bit Atari, as well as one of the best DOS's. And there's a lot of expansion hardware as well. I hope that it's not lost and gone forever.

The Ice-T terminal program for Atari XE's has reached version 2.72, and most of the significant bugs have been fixed. I understand that the author has decided to discontinue this shareware product. However the latest version is still available. Ice-T provide VT100 emulation in 80 columns. It also can keep up with modems as fast as 19200 bps.

Markus Gietzen almost decided to stop supporting his XL-it! Atari 8-bit emulator for the PC. He was discouraged by criticisms from persons wanting more game compatibility. However, Markus was encouraged by many others to keep on with it. The latest version (0.17) is now available. It features Ron Fries' pokey emulator, a new sound driver, improved SIO emulation and more. Sparta DOS 3.2 works with this version.

Our own John Picken has a 1MB Atari XE computer. Most of that memory is used as a RAM disk. The speed of the RAM disk depends on the controlling software. John has now created software that runs a ram disk some four to five times as fast as SpartaDOS-X. I gather that this speed came not by hand assembling the machine language, but by changing the algorithm. I'll have to leave it to John to explain.

GCACE MEETINGS

Don't Get Zapped!

by Rowland Grant

The January Meeting is also the Annual General Meeting at which we elect officers for a year's term. As usual the meeting began with reports and approval of the financial statement for the previous year. For the last couple of years we ran a small deficit. This year we had a small surplus. As for the elections, there was only one nomination per position, so everybody was elected by acclamation. Gordon Hooper remains President and Editor. John Picken is Vice President. Rowland Grant is Secretary. John Towler is Treasurer. John Robson is now Librarian (8-bit). Ted Skrecky is Librarian (ST). There are four directors: Noel Black, Craig Carmichael, Bob Nex, George Rose. The Club's current membership stands at 35. All this information has been dutifully reported to the Minister of Finance and Corporate Affairs, and a fee of $15 has been paid. I hope that the government is encouraged by our example. After all, if Garden City ACE can balance its budget so can the government.

The February Meeting featured the adjustment of ST monochrome monitors. Often SM124 monitors come from the factory with a rather small visible screen which is not centred. The external controls only handle screen brightness, contrast and sound volume. However there are six internal controls that can be twiddled easily to change the screen in other ways. I gave a demonstration of this. Five of these controls look like small ivory buttons with a cross cut in the middle. One is a plastic shaft with a slot in the end. Because video tubes involve rather high voltages one needs a long shafted, narrow bladed, insulated screwdriver to turn these control buttons. I don't have one. So I made a screwdriver by whittling the end of a long bamboo chopstick. For further safety one should wear insulated gloves.

In my demonstration I unplugged the power and monitor cords, and

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removed the screws from the case with a standard Phillips screwdriver. The rear case was pulled back and the sound connection wire was unplugged from the circuit board. Now I donned my black leather gloves (no metal in them), attached the power cord and computer connection again, switched on the monitor, and then booted the computer. Looked at from the rear, there are three buttons in a line on the right hand side of the video tube. These are labelled V.Hold, V.Size, and V.Lin. The V.Hold button is the vertical sync adjust. You probably don't need to touch it unless the screen tends to drift upwards or downwards. The V.Size button will expand the screen top and bottom. Turn V.Size until the diagonal dimension of the visible screen is ten inches. It could be larger, but I understand that a bigger screen subjects nearby capacitors to a higher voltage. This could reduce the life of the capacitors. Now drag the icon of drive B down to the bottom of the screen. Does it look the same size as the drive A icon at the top? If not, turn button V.Lin until it does. Now look for the button H.Center on the left rear of the circuit board. Turn it until the screen is centered. Set the screen for maximum brightness using the external controls. Is it bright enough? If not, turn the button labelled SubBright, which is near H.Centre. Is the screen a bit fuzzy? If so, find the slotted, white plastic shaft (marked Focus) to the left of SubBright. Slowly turn this shaft until the pixels are sharp. Turn off the computer and monitor. Disconnect all monitor cables. The gloves can come off now. Attach the sound wire and the rear case.

Gordon Hooper brought an armload of surplus STart magazines to the February meeting for members. I find old magazines helpful at times, especially reviews and hints for software. All of the software available locally is used, and much of it is old (and sometimes very good).

As ST Librarian, Ted Skrecky lugs at least 200 library disks to every meeting. Every time we plunk the carton of library stuff in the car we speculate on how convenient a few CD ROM's would be. Well, I guess Ted decided to stop speculating. He bought copies of the Crawly Crypt Collection Vol 1 and 2. The Collection is on two CD ROM disks. These contain over 1200MB of public domain software for ST's. Files from these disks will be available to members at meetings in the future. Or at least, when we have figured out how to set the terminating bloc, jumper, whatever, on Gordon's SCSI CD ROM drive. We hope that it will run with the Mega2 that we bring to meetings. Ted made up a disk containing the indexes of the Crawly Crypt CDs. Copies are available.

Public domain software is not as easy to find as it used to be. Many of the old Atari ST bases, Hensa, UMich, do not seem to be functioning. We should thank John Towler for his efforts in finding new material for the ST disk of the month. It was the modest profit on the sale of these disks (and coffee) that accounted for our small surplus last year.

GCACE